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ONIONS, CAULIFLOWER AND BANANAS MAY NOT SEEM VERY EXOTIC, BUT THEY ADD FANTASTIC FLAVOUR TO A WIDE RANGE OF DISHES.

Recipes and styling: Jo Wilcox

Photographs: Shaun Cato-Symonds

Onions

- The onion is the most widely used flavouring vegetable in the world. As a base, onions bring richness, sweetness, texture and depth of flavour to dishes.
- The onion family varies hugely in shape, size, colour, texture and intensity of flavour. Brown onions are the most common, but red onions, shallots, garlic, chives, spring onions and leeks are all related.
- Onions are available all year around. Choose onions with firm flesh and a clean, dry, papery outer skin. Avoid those with green shoots. Store in a cool, dark, well-ventilated place. They will sweat in plastic. Don't refrigerate them or store them with other foods that may absorb their flavour.
- Onions are a valuable source of vitamin C and play an important part in protecting against chronic diseases, as well as promoting general well-being.
- Eat onions raw or cooked in salads, soups, sauces, casseroles, pizza or pies.

Cauliflowers

- Cauliflower, meaning "cabbage flower" in Latin, is a member of the brassica family and has been grown for more than 2000 years. Most common are the white heads but miniature cauliflowers and broccoflower, which is a hybrid mix of cauliflower and broccoli, are sometimes available in limited supply.
- Always choose a close-knit white head with firm "curds" or florets and make sure the outer leaves closest to the cauliflower head are lush and green – this is a good indicator of freshness. Store in a plastic bag in the refrigerator.
- Cauliflower is an excellent source of vitamin C, vitamin K and folate.
- Cook cauliflower florets in boiling water until the stem is just tender when pierced. Cauliflower is perhaps most popular when topped with tasty cheese sauce and golden crumbs and grilled, but you can also try it in stir-fries, soups, blanched for salads and eaten raw for crudité's or snacking. They are available all year round.

Bananas

- Bananas are the most popular fruit in New Zealand. Formerly a wild plant with inedible fruit, over time they were cultivated to produce the yellow-skinned fruit with creamy flesh that we love today.
- Bananas are thought to have originated in Malaysia but they are now cultivated in many countries and shipped worldwide.
- They are the perfect snack food in their own packaging, with readily available sugars for a fast energy-release boost. They are a good source of potassium and are considered to have many valuable health benefits.
- Deciding when a banana is ready for eating is a personal choice, but they are generally at their peak when greenish yellow with a few brown spots. Eat them at room temperature. When very ripe, they can be stored in the refrigerator – the skin will turn black but the fruit will still remain good, especially for baking.
- Bananas can be used in baking, fruit salads, smoothies and cooked in curries or savoury dishes to lend natural sweetness.

